**The Killing of Kitty Genovese**   
*Her public slaying in Queens becomes a symbol of Americans' failure to get involved*

Michael Dorman – *Newsday* – June 10, 1998

It was just after 3 a.m.

A red Fiat rolled slowly through the darkness into a parking space adjacent to the Long Island Rail Road station in Kew Gardens. The young woman behind the wheel emerged from the car and locked it. She began the 100-foot walk toward her apartment house at 82-70 Austin St.

But then she spotted a man standing along her route. Apparently afraid, she changed direction and headed toward the intersection of Austin and Lefferts Boulevard -- where there was a police call box.

Suddenly, the man overtook her and grabbed her. She screamed. Residents of nearby apartment houses turned on their lights and threw open their windows. The woman screamed again: ``Oh, my God, he stabbed me! Please help me!''

A man in a window shouted: ``Let that girl alone.'' The attacker walked away. Apartment lights went out and windows slammed shut. The victim staggered toward her apartment. But the attacker returned and stabbed her again.

``I'm dying!'' she cried.

Windows opened again. The attacker entered a car and drove away. Windows closed, but [the attacker came back a half an hour later.] His victim had crawled inside the front door of an apartment house at 82-62 Austin St. [He found her lying, barely conscious, in a hallway at the back of the building where a locked doorway had prevented her from entering the building. Out of view of the street and of those who may have heard or seen any sign of the original attack, he proceeded to further attack her, stabbing her several more times. Knife wounds in her hands suggested that she attempted to defend herself from him. While she lay dying, he raped her. He stole about $49 from her and left her in the hallway.]

It was not until 3:50 that morning -- March 13, 1964 -- that a neighbor of the victim called police. Officers arrived two minutes later and found the body. They identified the victim as Catherine Genovese, 28, who had been returning from her job as manager of a bar in Hollis. Neighbors knew her not as Catherine but as Kitty.

Kitty Genovese: It was a name that would become symbolic in the public mind for a dark side of the national character. It would stand for Americans who were too indifferent or too frightened or too alienated or too self-absorbed to ``get involved'' in helping a fellow human being in dire trouble. A term ``the Genovese syndrome'' would be coined to describe the attitude.

Detectives investigating Genovese's murder discovered that no fewer than 38 of her neighbors had witnessed at least one of her killer's three attacks but had neither come to her aid nor called the police. The one call made to the police came after Genovese was already dead.

Assistant Chief Inspector Frederick Lussen, commander of Queens detectives, said that nothing in his 25 years of police work had shocked him so much as the apathy encountered on the Genovese murder. ``As we have reconstructed the crime, the assailant had three chances to kill this woman during a 35-minute period,'' Lussen said. ``If we had been called when he first attacked, this woman might not be dead now.''

Expressions of outrage cascaded not only from public officials and private citizens in the New York area but from across the country. When detectives asked Genovese's neighbors why they had not taken action, many said they had been afraid or had not wanted to get involved. But Lt. Bernard Jacobs, in charge of the investigation, asked: ``Where they are in their homes, near phones, why should they be afraid to call the police?''

Madeline Hartmann, a native of France, was 68 at the time of the murder and lived in the building where Genovese died. On the 20th anniversary of the murder, she said in an interview she did not feel bad about failing to call the police. ``So many, many [other] times in the night, I heard screaming,'' she said. ``I'm not the police and my English speaking is not perfect.''

There was no law, police officials conceded, that required someone witnessing a crime to report it to police. But they contended that morality should oblige a witness to do so.

Over the years, there have been various scholarly studies of ``the Genovese syndrome.'' At a three-day Catherine Genovese Memorial Conference on Bad Samaritanism at Fordham University in 1984, City University of New York psychology professor Stanley Milgram capsulized the questions raised by the Genovese murder.

``The case touched on a fundamental issue of the human condition, our [most basic] nightmare,'' Milgram said. ``If we need help, will those around us stand around and let us be destroyed or will they come to our aid?”